

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, February 17th, 2019

### Jeremiah 17:5-8

**5Thus says the Lord: Cursed** From the beginning until the end of time, the whole of God's work is a blessing. In Deuteronomy it says that the law of God is a blessing to those that follow it and a curse to those who don't. The curse is the lack of the blessing. Like a light switch, if you don't have it on, it's off and you are in the dark. We choose.<sup>2</sup> **is the one who trusts in human beings,** This is a reference to King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Jeremiah urged him to surrender to the Babylonians but Zedekiah refused to do so. During a break in the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah left the city. Officers demanded his death for desertion and his call to surrender. Zedekiah compromised and put Jeremiah in a cistern. A slave convinced the king to release Jeremiah. The king came to believe in Jeremiah's counsel but did not surrender for fear of shame.<sup>9</sup> **who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord.** Such a one does not hate God, rather, he is indifferent to him which is the opposite of love.<sup>2</sup> To the Hebrew, what is written on the heart has permanence for they thought that the heart was the seat of the intellect and the will and controlled the thinking.<sup>4</sup> Later on in Jeremiah, it says that "God will write a new covenant on their hearts."

**6He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth.** The soil from which it would draw life is itself lifeless, made sterile by salt. In looking at the difference between the shrub and ourselves, we have a choice while the shrub has none.<sup>5</sup>

**7Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord.** God is man's sole refuge. This expresses the real heart of true religion.<sup>3</sup>

**8He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream:** This running water symbolizes the currents of grace.<sup>8</sup> **It fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.** This fruit is all the good works that he does.<sup>8</sup> We can also consider the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>1</sup> Both the trustworthy and the wicked are surrounded with desert; only the former has its roots deeply sunk in God's will (it has stored up strength for its trials) and so in God's time produces fruit. This time for Jeremiah was after his death, when this poem inspired the writing of Psalm 1.<sup>4</sup>

### 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

*This is the third part of Paul's discussion on resurrection and part of the fundamental doctrines that Paul faithfully transmitted to the churches he founded. He is speaking to the Christians at Corinth who live in the heart of Greek culture. The Greeks saw life after death as something that happened only to the soul. Paul's goal is to clarify for them how the resurrection of the dead is an inevitable consequence of everything they already believe about Jesus.<sup>7</sup> On no point does the Christian faith encounter more opposition than on the resurrection of the body.<sup>1</sup> (CCC 996) The Catholic teaching is that God will grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> (CCC 997) All the dead will rise, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.<sup>1</sup> (CCC 998)*

Brothers and sisters:

**12If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?** Such a denial might stem from either a Jewish or a Greek

background for the Sadducees held a minority view within Judaism that emphatically denied the resurrection of the dead and among the Greeks it was commonly held that the body was a prison that was destined to decay once the soul was liberated from it at death. Both of these attitudes about the future of the body led to a denial of Christian doctrine and a sharp decline in morality.<sup>10</sup>

**16**If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, Paul insists that belief in the resurrection of Jesus and belief in the resurrection of all Christians are linked. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen and if that is the case, three conclusions follow<sup>6</sup>:

**17**and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. This is the first conclusion—the Corinthians are still in their sins if there is no resurrection.<sup>6</sup> If Jesus did not overcome death, then he could not have destroyed sin, for death is the consequence of sin. (Gen.3:17-19)<sup>10</sup>

**18**Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. This is the second conclusion—those who have died are completely destroyed if there is no resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

**19**If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. This is the third conclusion—Christians are fools to be pitied if there is no resurrection.<sup>6</sup> What was the reason for going through the persecution and, in many cases, death? It would be pointless and foolish.<sup>7</sup>

**20**But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. “Fallen asleep” is a euphemism for biological death. In the liturgy of ancient Israel the first portion of a crop was offered to God in the Temple as a means of consecrating the whole of the expected harvest. So, Christ is not only the first to be raised in glory but his resurrected humanity is an offering that ensures an entire harvest of believers will be raised as he was.<sup>10</sup> His resurrection is the first and best of the harvest (the first fruits) and ours is the rest of the harvest.<sup>5</sup>

## **Luke 6:17, 20-26**

*This passage from Luke is sometimes called the “Sermon on the Plain” to distinguish it from Matthew’s “sermon on the Mount.”<sup>2</sup> Matthew has nine beatitudes and no woes while Luke has four of each.<sup>5</sup> The Beatitudes (beatitude comes from a Latin word which means “blessing” and also “challenge”) describe what it means to be a real follower of Christ. They are also a standard of conduct and a way in which we can live our lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ.<sup>7</sup> They take the accepted standards of the world and turn them upside down. They are a series of bombshells that are very revolutionary!<sup>14</sup>*

**17**Jesus came down Jesus came down the mountain which suggests that Jesus is a new Moses coming down from a new Mount Sinai to give a New Law for the New Covenant People of God.<sup>2</sup> with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. These were two coastal cities north of Palestine in Phoenicia. People from these areas were predominantly Gentiles, a fact that highlights Jesus’ popularity outside Israel.<sup>11</sup>

**20**And raising his eyes This is an action recorded of Jesus on especially solemn occasions.<sup>3</sup> toward his disciples he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. The word that is translated “poor” usually means the lowly ones who depend desperately upon Yahweh for help and Jesus sees them in this audience and speaks directly to them: “you who are poor.” In Matthew, Jesus speaks objectively of “the poor.”<sup>3</sup> It is not poverty itself

that is blessed but the poor who know that they depend on God.<sup>6</sup> Here Jesus fulfills the prophecy of 4:18 where “He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” This may denote material poverty defined by social or economic conditions as well as spiritual poverty defined by inward detachment. Note that the materially poor can be attached to the little they own even as the wealthy can live in poverty of spirit.<sup>11</sup> On a practical level, Jesus was telling the people from Judea and Jerusalem that their poverty was a blessing. He was also telling the people from Tyre and Sidon that their wealth was a potential cause of woe for they held northern Palestine in economic bondage.<sup>2</sup> **Blessed are you who are now hungry,** It is not hunger that is blessed but a hunger that leads people to seek God.<sup>6</sup> Hunger can refer to famine for the word of God. Hunger and thirst are often messianic terms.<sup>3</sup>

**21for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping,** This refers to those who are sorrowful at disaster caused by apostasy and as a sign of repenting.<sup>13</sup> **for you will laugh.**

**22Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil** (This phrasing suggests an exorcism applied to the Christians!)<sup>13</sup> **on account of the Son of Man.** Luke is emphasizing that every follower of Christ must share his rejection.<sup>3</sup> The verbs used here move from attitude (hate) to action (exclude) to speech (insult and denounce your name).<sup>13</sup> The Beatitudes of 20-22 stand opposite the covenant curses, or Woes of 24-26. Jesus envisions the conditions of this life being overturned in the next, where the blessed can expect their present suffering to give way to future peace, and the prosperous can expect divine curses if wealth and notoriety have smothered their love for God. Luke’s point is that such treatment will inevitably come. It is part of the cost of discipleship. Indeed, it is proof of discipleship, a guarantee that our lives are radically Christian enough to prompt such ridicule.<sup>5</sup>

**23Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!** “That day” is a messianic term that refers to the coming of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The joy comes from knowing through our sufferings that we have truly become united to the sufferings of Christ—and so will share in his ultimate joy.<sup>5</sup> **Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.** Those who are rejected by humans in verse 22, because of their relationship with the Son of Man, are being accepted by God. Before he was stoned, Stephen said: “Which of the prophets did not your ancestors persecute?” On the other hand, if our faith life as a representative of Christ is accepted by humans, it is like being a false prophet. These were known to say what the king or the people wanted to hear rather than what God was truly saying.<sup>13</sup>

**24But woe** “Woe” is a cry of impending distress used by the prophets of Israel and Jesus voices the same cry to warn that disaster awaits the comfortable of the world whose prosperity and notoriety have turned them away from God and the demands of his covenant.

<sup>11</sup> The “Woes” follow the reverse pattern of the “Beatitudes.” To the blessedness of the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted there corresponds the sadness of the popular, the happy, the full, and the rich. The woes are not so much condemnations as they are exhortations to wake up and smell the coffee before it’s too late.<sup>6</sup> **to you who are rich,** Society’s most prosperous and prestigious members. Their success in this life can tempt them to overlook the need for God and his mercy. Worldly wealth is thus dangerous because it can lead to selfishness and a false sense of security. **for you have received your consolation.** What Jesus is saying is this: If you set your heart and bend your whole energies to obtain the things which the world values, you will get them—but that is all you will ever get.”<sup>14</sup> St.

Augustine makes it very clear that it is not the amount of money that one has that determines our poverty of spirit for “Lazarus was poor, but he to whose bosom he was brought was rich for Abraham was a very wealthy man when he was on earth: he had an abundance of money, a large family, flocks, land; and yet that rich man was poor, because he was humble. (Isaac, Moses, David and Job were also rich.) Abraham was faithful, he did good things, he received the commandment to offer his son in sacrifice and he did not refuse to offer what he had received to Him from whom he had received it. He was approved in God’s sight and set before us as an example of faith.” On the other hand, if someone is not well-off he is not justified in God’s sight on that account, if he fails to strive to acquire those virtues in which true poverty consists.<sup>12</sup>

**25 Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep.** This section is about eternal choice. Will you take the easy way which yields immediate pleasure and profit or will you take the hard way which yields immediate toil and sometimes suffering?

**26 Woe to you when all speak well of you,** This warning is about flattery and the disordered desire for human glory. **for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”** In the biblical tradition he is speaking of the popular prophets who tell people what they want to hear.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (2) Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “The Books of Jeremiah and Baruch” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (5) “Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers:2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (6) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (8) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (9) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (10) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians” with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) “The Navarre Bible: St. Luke,” (13) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson and (14) “The Gospel of Luke” by William Barclay.

*In memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*